

Mexican Wolf Management Oversight Committee
Summary Notes for October 2-3, 2003

Location: Safford, Arizona, at the Quality Inn

Time: 1-5 pm on October 2, and 8am till Noon on October 3

Participants: Arizona Game and Fish Department (Terry Johnson [Committee Chair], Bill Van Pelt, Richard Remington, Dan Groebner, and Commissioner Joe Carter), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Chuck Hayes), White Mountain Apache Tribe (Cynthia Dale), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Colleen Buchanan, John Oakleaf, Joy Nicholopoulos), USDA Forest Service (Wally Murphy), and Graham County (Mark Herrington), Catron County (Alex Thal), Sierra County (Adam Polley), Greenlee County (Kay Gale, Hector Ruedas), New Mexico Department of Agriculture (George Douds), and Navajo County (J.R. Despain).

Opening Remarks

Initial discussion focused on structure and function of these meetings, and whom to invite. When we first began meeting (February 2003), each time we held an early session for AMOC members, a second session that was open to other Cooperators, and a third session (AMWG) that was open to the public. In June 2003, an especially contentious issue was discussed in the second session (alleged “stand down” order from USFWS to Wildlife Services on take of wolf 592). Afterward, some Cooperators said that made them realize why sometimes it might be better not to be in the room when AMOC members are “working through their issues with each other.” However, AMOC meetings that are not open to all Cooperators also reinforce, rather than break down, Cooperator feelings of exclusion and distrust.

Concern was expressed today about excluding any partners from meetings in which their interests are being addressed. Although agencies may occasionally need to meet one-on-one regarding specific elements of the wolf reintroduction project, that should be the exception and not the rule. When the subject could affect the entire cooperative reintroduction effort, then the entire Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC; the Lead Agencies) should discuss the subject, and the Counties and other Cooperators should be invited. It seems better to be present to hear things you would rather not hear, than to be absent while issues are discussed that you want to hear about and discuss.

All present agreed with this change, to combining the first two sessions so Cooperators are invited to AMOC meetings, which will continue to be scheduled immediately before the quarterly AMWG meetings. This should facilitate Project discussions and decisions.

Action Item: Henceforth, AMOC will meet before the Adaptive Management Work Group, and the Counties and other Cooperators will be invited to participate in the AMOC meetings.

Introductions and Agenda Review.

Each attendee introduced herself or himself, as a few new faces were present.

Items identified for this meeting's agenda were: information dissemination, aerial support and budget, role and function, MOU completion, ground rules and rules of engagement rules and surfacing issues, annual report review, USDA Wildlife Service issue, and time period for compensation payment. The meeting then proceeded with the agenda items.

Ground and Rules of Engagement

A few minutes were spent reviewing the basic ground rules for these meetings: active listening (ask questions and get answers), one person speaks at a time, focus on issues not personalities, seek common ground and closure, etc.

Concern was raised about not raising, and striving to resolve, issues at AMOC/AMWG meetings. We cannot continue making decisions at meetings, only to have the same issues come back through another hierarchical level because someone left the table without having surfaced and resolved their disagreement.

People need to be comfortable with the discussions and the decisions made in AMOC. We are representing our agencies because they have appointed us to do so. Issues for policy and program decisions need to be discussed by all MOU "signatories," and we need to move on once a decision has been made. We cannot engage the public if we do not trust one another and speak with a single voice from AMOC/AMWG. If someone has an issue, they need to get it up on the table so we can discuss it and resolve it.

Mortalities

Since the end of August 2003, five wolves have died in the wild. This a high number in a short period of time, but on a yearly basis it is equivalent to the yearly average for Yellowstone and is within the range predicted in the Mexican Wolf EIS. We also need to remember that human related mortalities are high in any wolf reintroduction effort.

LAW ENFORCEMENT INFORMATION REDACTION. Usually the released information contains the wolf number and a general location. However, it needs to be made clear to the public that no conclusions as to the cause of death can be drawn until the necropsy report is final. We need to ensure that people are aware of the roles played by the State and Federal authorities.

Action Item: **LAW ENFORCEMENT INFORMATION REDACTION.**

Compensation fund payment

A concern was raised that it may be taking too long for claims to be processed for livestock compensation. A discussion occurred about investigating depredations, report submittal, and information needed for payment. It was the understanding of the group that Defenders of Wildlife needs a written report from Wildlife Services to process depredation payments. However, it was unclear to those present whether or not a report is written up and sent in immediately following the investigation.

Action Item: Terry will invite Defenders to Wildlife and try to ensure the presence of Wildlife Services at the next AMOC meeting to discuss the process for livestock depredation compensation. In addition to the information on the process, information on report submittal and payment periods needs to be brought to the next meeting for evaluation and discussion.

Annual Report

The draft 2001 and 2002 Arizona field activity reports were handed out to cooperators for review. Comments are due to Dan Groebner by October 16. There was some confusion on the purpose of the annual reports distributed for review, and how they relate to the Project-wide annual report. The annual report distributed is required for the Arizona Game and Fish Department for funding and reporting to the AGF Commission. It only details field activities and can be used by USFWS to draft the annual Recovery Program report. If the Project-wide annual report had been available, it would have been used instead of spending time generating these state-specific reports.

Closer cooperation among cooperators is needed to eliminate duplication of effort. It was agreed that field activities should be summarized by Field Team Leaders, per the draft MOU, and submitted to the Field Coordinator for incorporation into the Recovery Program report.

Action Items

1. Comment on the Arizona annual activity reports to Dan Groebner by October 16.
2. In the MOU discussion later today, address the issue of who is responsible for developing the Project-wide annual report.

USDA APHIS Wildlife Service Issue

The counties provided copies of a September 23, 2003 letter from Wildlife Services (David Bergman) to USFWS (Colleen Buchanan) regarding Reintroduction Project-related actions of the Wildlife Service effective October 1, 2003. The reasons stated in the letter for these actions were lack of funding and commitment by USFWS. The actions include removing Alan Armistead from the Field Team, maintaining one individual to respond to wolf depredations, and continuing the carnivore research only for the first year.

None of the other cooperators had seen the letter until it was distributed at the meeting, including the intended recipient (Buchanan). The counties are very concerned about removal of Alan Armistead from the Project, because of his excellent working relationship with local communities. The counties intend to write a letter requesting retention of Alan.

USFWS pointed out what they believe are inaccuracies in the September 23 letter – particularly regarding the USFWS contribution to the depredation research project. USFWS said its agreement with Wildlife Services was for \$125,000 (FY03 funds) from USFWS to be split within Wildlife Services as follows: \$80,000 for predator study off reservation, \$20,000 for predator study on reservation, and \$25,000 for normal wolf management activities. USFWS only provided \$25,000 for normal wolf management activities because that amount plus the FY03 Congressional allocation to Wildlife Services totaled the same as the funding that USFWS provided to Wildlife Services for these activities in the prior Fiscal Year.

Wildlife Services has declined to provide information to USFWS on how it spent its USFWS funds last year, or on how it intends to spend its FY03 Congressional allocation for Mexican wolf work.

Action Items

1. Terry will call the Wildlife Service representative to AMOC (Bergman) and request information on the Congressional allocation, such as the dollar amount and expenditures.
2. Terry will also encourage a discussion between the USFWS and Wildlife Services to occur as quickly as possible, in hopes of resolving this impasse. Full Wildlife Services support is essential to the Project.

Aerial Support and Budgets

Weekly telemetry flights were cancelled recently because the USFWS was unable to meet all FY03 budget requests from the cooperators (i.e. AGFD and NMDGF). Funding for flights is a component of the AGFD Field Team budget. The flights were cut because it was more important to keep people in the field than to monitor every collared wolf. However, flights are occurring on a “need to” basis. Budget request shortfalls are \$78,000 for AGFD and \$18,000 for NMDGF. USFWS is now working under a continuing resolution, and the FY04 financial picture is likely to be no better than, and may be worse, than the FY03 situation.

The counties voiced concern regarding the lack of flights. For a short-term fix, AGFD offered to pay for two months of flights (from non-wolf funding) to give the cooperators time to identify a more permanent solution.

Action Items

1. AGFD will ensure two months of telemetry flight (October-November).

2. NMDGF and USFWS will look at their own budgets to see whether they can help cover subsequent costs.
3. In November, AGFD will make a decision about future flights, based on the available funding (USFWS flight fund are loaded in the AGFD contract budget).
4. If flights will not be continue after November, AGFD will notify the counties and other interested and affected parties.

Memorandum of Understanding

The MOU was reviewed page by page. Corrections were made and agreed to by everyone present. The process for finalizing the MOU is as follows:

Action Items

1. By October 7, NMDGF will provide information to Terry regarding New Mexico's authority to enter into the MOU, and regarding it concerns about addressing "sufficiency of resources" in the Terms and Conditions section.
2. By October 7, the counties will provide information to Terry on their authorities to enter into the MOU, and draft text for a new bullet (#5) in the current "The Cooperators shall" section of the MOU.
3. By October 7, USFS will provide information to Terry regarding its authority to enter into the MOU.
4. Terry will incorporate this information into the MOU, and distribute the final draft MOU to the potential signatories by Oct. 8.
5. All potential signatories will complete their final review (for policy and legal issues, not style or wordsmithing) of the draft MOU by October 23, and by close of business on that date they will email concurrence and/or specific concerns to Terry.
6. Terry will distribute the (revised, if necessary) draft final MOU to all potential signatory agencies, upload a copy in pdf format on the AGFD website, and distribute a public notice of availability by November 1, 2004.
7. The potential signatory agencies have until January 9, 2004 to take the MOU through their public process to obtain approval for signature. By January 9, 2004, each signatory agency will provide notice to Terry that their approval process has been completed.
8. Completion (approval) of the final MOU will be formally announced at the January 30, 2004 AMWG Meeting (see below).

Cooperators have until January 9, 2004 to take the MOU through their public process to obtain approvals for signatures.

Five-year Review

USFWS provided an information sheet to assist with stimulating a discussion on how the five-year review should be conducted. Elements that must be taken into consideration are self evaluation by the field team, use of independent reviewers, contracting out elements such as social and economic analysis, recommendations from the three-year review, feedback from the States' independent review, and workshops and public hearings.

Action Item: By November 21, cooperators will provide comment to Colleen on the best approach for the five-year review. Colleen will incorporate comments and distribute a synthesized recommendation identifying timelines, public participation process, and possible work groups, by January 9, 2004. It will be discussed and a final process will be identified at the January 29-30, 2004 AMOC meeting and in the January 30 AMWG meeting.

Public Information Process

NMDGF has the lead in developing a process for news releases regarding the Project. In June-July, cooperators crafted a response matrix (procedure). The draft will be redistributed to all signatory agencies. In addition, all cooperators are encouraged to train their people on screening wolf calls to ensure that calls are handled properly.

Action Item: Chuck will coordinate a comment period to finalize news release matrix.

Closing Remarks and Adjournment

Virtual completion of the final draft MOU was briefly celebrated.

The next AMOC/AMWG members (non-public) meeting will be on January 29, 2004, in Socorro, New Mexico. The meeting will start at 1 p.m. The meeting will continue the next day, from 8 am until Noon.

The next AMWG Meeting will be on January 30, from 1 until business is done, or 5 pm, whichever comes first. It will also be in Socorro, New Mexico. New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will make the local arrangements.

Before closing the meeting, today's participants recognized Auggie Shelhorn's participation in the Mexican Wolf Adaptive Management Process. Mr. Shelhorn passed away earlier this year, not long after the July 9 Adaptive Management meeting in Glenwood, New Mexico. Contributions in memory of Auggie can be made to the Glenwood Community Center.